



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
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NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK EDITORIAL

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Libraries contribute to the circle of knowledge

50th Anniversary of National Library Week is April 13 to 19

By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

This year's National Library Week theme, "Join the Circle of Knowledge" sets a wonderful tone for libraries as centers of lifelong learning.

From preschool story time, to grade school reports and college research papers, to job searches, financial planning, or health care information, libraries are a key resource for education and learning throughout life. Although the Internet is increasingly important in day-to-day information gathering, the majority of Americans still use the library, and many do so for high-speed Internet access. In Wisconsin, 3.3 million citizens are registered library users. State residents borrowed nearly 60 million items in a year's time. Library events attracted 1.7 million residents and patrons used public Internet computers in the library 7.6 million times a year.

National Library Week was inaugurated 50 years ago to celebrate libraries and the trained library professionals who help visitors find the information they need. A national survey of overall library use recently found that seven in 10 people received help from library staff when they visited the library. Those asking for help were able to find information they needed at a significantly higher rate than those who visited the library but didn't ask for help.

Library professionals are trained to search for answers online or in library collections, and they support communities in many other ways. Wisconsin public librarians are joining with educators in a five-year statewide focus on teen services. This Adolescent Literacy Initiative will support our efforts to boost student achievement. Libraries will be part of the solution to improve reading achievement for middle and high school students. Those who read well, succeed.

Wisconsin will soon receive a research report on the economic impact of our state's public libraries. This information will be helpful in planning and budgeting for the future of public libraries in

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our state. We already know that strong school library programs support student achievement. School library media specialists find books to inspire reluctant readers, maintain library resources that help students find factual information on the Internet, and help teachers find material to support classroom instruction. This new research will quantify the value of public libraries to economic development and quality of life in Wisconsin.

Libraries, whether they be bricks and mortar or reside in the virtual world, hold the wisdom of the ages. In honor of National Library Week, April 13 to 19, I encourage all citizens to “Join the Circle of Knowledge@Your Library.”

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTES: Data on library usage is from 2006 library annual reports. A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>. This editorial is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008_61.pdf.